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CHEAP REPOSITORY.

SUNDAY READING.

THE SOWER.

A

PARABLE

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PARABLE, &c.

"BEHOLD," says our Lord Jesus Christ, "a Sower went out to sow; and when he sowed some seeds fell by the way-side, and the fowls came and devoured them up; some fell on stony places where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprang up because they had no deepness of earth; and when the sun was up they were scorched; and because they had no root they withered away; and some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choaked them; but others fell in good ground and brought forth fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold."

By this beautiful Parable our Lord informs his disciples of the manner in which his word would be received by different hearers. "When any one," says he, "heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart: this is he that receiveth seed by the way side." By not understanding the word is here meant, a want of faith to receive it, an unwillingness to submit our

ſelves to the tutoring of the Holy Spirit, a preference of our own reaſoning faculties to the word of God; ſuch a diſpoſition as this it was that prevented the Jews from reaping the advantage of our Lord's preaching, and ſuch it is at this day that prevents numbers from acknowledging him as their Saviour; we wiſh to be our own teachers rather than to be taught of God. "Faith," ſaith St. Paul, "is the ſubſtance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not ſeen." "Without Faith," continues the Apoſtle, "we cannot pleaſe God; for he that cometh to God muſt believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him."

All thoſe holy men, on whom God was pleaſed to beſtow any peculiar favor, or to make uſe of as his inſtruments in his judgments or mercies to mankind, were remarkable for their holy lives, and eſpecially for their faith in his promiſes.

Noah proved his faith by building the ark, in which he and his houſe were ſaved, and thereby became heirs of the righteouſneſs that is by faith. Abraham, at the word of God, left his country, and went into a ſtrange land, and heſitated not to offer up his ſon as a ſacrifice to the Lord; even, though in that his only Son, who was promiſed to be the father of many nations; but, as St. Paul juſtly obſerves, he accounted that God was able to raiſe him up even from the dead, and for this his faith and obedience we read, that he was ſtyled the friend of God. By faith Moſes received power to conduct the children of Iſrael through the Red Sea on dry land, which the Egyptians attempting to do were drowned. In a word, numberleſs are the inſtances, both from the Old and New Teſtament, to prove the neceſſity and efficacy of faith.

The Apoſtle Paul, in the xi Chap. of his Epiſtle to the Hebrews, enumerated many examples of faith and obedience from the Patriarchs concludes thus: "What ſhall I ſay more? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeion, of Barak, of Samſon, of Jepthe, of David, alſo of Samuel, and of the Prophets, who through faith, ſubdued kingdoms, wrought righteouſneſs, obtained promiſes, ſtopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, eſcaped the edge of the ſword, out of weakneſs were made ſtrong, waxed violent in fight, turned to flight the armies of Aliens. Of women who received their dead raiſed to life again, and of others who were tortured, not accepting deliverance that they might obtain a better reſurrection."

A ſteady faith and confidence in God was able to effect the greateſt miracles, and ſupport his people under the greateſt calamities. Chriſt tells us, that without faith we can do nothing. We ſhould therefore earneſtly pray to the Lord to help our unbelief, and ſtrengthen our faith in him. When we hear or read in the Holy Scriptures it ſhould be with a full truſt and confidence that we are reading the word of God, and, with a full ſenſe of our own weakneſs, and a ſincere deſire of edification; in ſuch a manner we may be aſſured God will enlighten our underſtanding, and enable us to imbibe that knowledge which ſhall make us wiſe unto ſalvation; the good ſeed will not fall by the way-ſide and be caught up by the wicked one; but, alas! many there are who read the Holy Scriptures rather with a view to cavil at the truths contained in them, than with a view to regulate their lives by them, they forget that they are poor blind mortals, incapable of comprehending the ſmalleſt of the works of the Deity,

they judge of his divine ways by their own carnal ones, and are not aware that all those things in the divine governance which, to our gross capacities appear difficulties, were we enlightened by a ray of the divinity, would vanish, and strike us with awe and admiration at their excellence and perfection, for the ways of God are not as those of men, and unless he is pleased to enlighten us, cannot be comprehended by them. The wicked one, in the words of our Lord's Parable, by which is meant the Devil, lies constantly in wait for an opportunity to catch away the word that is sown in our hearts, he is glad of any pretence to turn us from the right way, and to deprive us of that knowledge which will make us wise unto salvation: we may be assured that every sinful thought that arises in our minds, tending to invalidate the authority of the Holy Scriptures, is suggested by him for our undoing; he was a liar from the beginning, and will continue to till Christ hath put all enemies under his feet. Oh! my friends, beware of his evil suggestions, let us ever turn a deaf ear to them, and read and hear the word of God with that humility and holy reverence which befits a disciple of Christ. To be sensible of the inestimable blessing we possess in the Holy Scriptures, where the Almighty has openly revealed his will to his poor fallen creatures, we need only take a view of the dreadful state of darkness in which the heathen world were, and are still emerged; can there be a greater instance of human depravity than the worshipping of idols made with their own hands, giving to stocks and stones the glory and worship due to the living God alone? Among the most enlightened heathen nations they worshipped a multiplicity of gods, existing in their own imagination only, and

performed a variety of absurd and impious rights in honour of them, by which they degraded themselves below the brute. In other nations they sacrificed human victims to their gods, mothers cast their new-born infants into the devouring flames, in hopes of mitigating the wrath of their pretended divinities.

This alone is sufficient to shew what man is when left to his own evil imaginations, how gross, how sensual, how absurd are his ideas, and how little able he is to form any adequate notions of the Supreme God, or of his will. Can we then be sufficiently grateful for, or set too high a value on the Holy Scriptures, where our Almighty Father has so openly revealed to us his blessed will, and pointed out to us the way to worship him and to please him, where he comforts us by repeated promises of eternal life, and gives us council and consolation for every evil we are, from our own sin, doomed to undergo in this transitory one? "A man," says a pious writer, "may look into his Bible and see plainly there what will become of him when this present scene is shifted, as to his most important, I had almost said, only concern, a future state, whereas, if left to himself, the more he considered the point on every side the more he would find himself bewildered in doubts, without any determination." "Happy," continues he, "are we, who have a revelation, like its great author, full of grace and truth."

God has established the authority of Jesus Christ and his Apostles upon the most certain authority; *miracles* and *prophesy*, nothing therefore but the suggestions of the evil spirit, the father of lies, can cause us to doubt it. It is true upwards of seven-

teen hundred years have elapſed ſince thoſe miracles were wrought, but the teſtimony of them is eſtabliſhed upon ſo indiſputable a ground, that the greateſt and wiſeſt men in all ages, after the ſtricteſt inveſtigation, have been ſatisfied, and died rejoicing in the chriſtian faith, accounting all other learning, in compariſon of that, but as droſs. I cannot leave this ſubject without tranſcribing the obſervation of a pious writer; "the Holy Spirit," ſays he, "has in the Scriptures, condeſcended to the weaker and more ignorant part of mankind, in that plain unaffected ſtyle wherewith all neceſſary truths are delivered; he who has much underſtanding will find employment for his beſt thoughts in ſearching out the deep things of God's word; and he who has but little may learn enough from thence to make him wiſe unto ſalvation."

From all that has been ſaid let us, my friends, beware how, through doubts or unwillingneſs to receive the word, we ſuffer the wicked one to catch away the heavenly ſeed that is ſown in our heart, and ſo fail, after all the goodneſs and loving mercies of God, of receiving that benefit which our Lord Jeſus freely offers to all who will receive it.

We will now conſider the ſecond part of our Lord's Parable, which he explains thus: "He that received the ſeed into ſtony places the ſame is he that heareth the word and anon with joy receiveth it, yet hath he not root in himſelf but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or perſecution ariſeth becauſe of the word he is offended." The love of Jeſus is not ſufficiently ſtrong in his heart to ſupport him under ſuch heavy trials; he ſtill fears them who can kill the body; "the Spirit is willing but the fleſh is weak:" he joyfully receives

the word, acknowledges it to be the way of life, and would fain be a diſciple of Chriſt; but when men begin to ſcoff, and revile, and to perſecute, his love waxeth cold, and he ceaſes to look for health and ſtrength to that fountain from whence only he could draw them: it was not ſo with the bleſſed martyrs, "they," as the Apoſtle Paul obſerves had trials of cruel mockings and ſcourgings, yea of bonds and impriſonment, "they were ſtoned, they were ſawn aſunder, were tempted, were ſlain with the ſword; they wandered about in ſheepſkips and goat ſkins, being deſtitute, tormented afflicted." How different is our lot, we are placed in a country where we are in danger of no ſuch dangers or perſecutions, we have the bleſſed priviledge of profeſſing our faith openly, of exerciſing all the duties enjoined by our holy religion, without fear of theſe calamities which attended them; let us be grateful for ſuch a bleſſing, and rejoice rather than murmur at thoſe ſcoffs and revilings which will ever attend thoſe, whatever may be their ſtation in life, who ſeriouſly reſolve to take up their croſs and follow Chriſt. Our Lord has ſaid, "Bleſſed are ye when men ſhall revile and perſecute you, and ſay all manner of evil againſt you falſely for my name ſake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven."

It is the conſtant practice of people who have no religion to ridicule thoſe who attend to their religious duties, and act conſcientiouſly in all their dealings; but ſurely the cenſure of ſuch, ought not to have weight with thoſe who, awake to a ſenſe of their duty and eternal welfare, act upon better principles? What is the opinion of the world when compared with the favour of God, or what will it

profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? The holy Apostles, when persecuted and reviled, rejoiced that they were accounted worthy to suffer for the sake of their divine Master, and shall we, after such examples presume to murmur at the small, in comparison to theirs, persecutions that may attend us in our pilgrimage through life? No, let us rather rejoice that our patience and fortitude is exercised; and if the world has still such power over us as to communicate pain to our hearts from its tauntings or revilings, let it humble our pride by teaching us to distrust our own strength, and to pray without ceasing for support to him who has promised that he will hear us when we cry unto him; for if we are unable to support with temper the small inconveniencies that fall to our lot, have reason indeed to tremble, lest should we be assailed as the holy Martyrs were, we should not remain steadfast in our faith, and lest the love of Christ should not have taken root sufficiently in our hearts to preserve in the hour of such temptation. Let us pray that the seed fall not into stony ground, and, under God, exert our powers to bear with fortitude and resignation the calamities of this life, having our eye fixed constantly on our Lord Christ who will manifest his strength in our weakness, and suffer us to reign with him if we continue steadfast to the end. Our Lord next, under the Parable of the seed that fell among thorns, warns us to beware of worldly cares and pleasures, which, he tells us, choke the word and render it unfruitful.

In order to avoid this, we must set a strict guard upon our hearts, and constantly keep in view the insufficiency of all human things, the short time we can enjoy them, and the eternity that is to follow

f our minds are continually ſet on temporal things, f we buſy ourſelves conſtantly in the purſuit after iches and worldly honours, we cannot be the diſ- ciples of Chriſt, his kingdom was not of this world. "It is eaſier," ſays our Lord, "for a camel to go hrough the eye of a needle than for a rich man to nter into the kingdom of heaven." The meaning of which is, that as the rich have it in their power o gratify all their wiſhes, and to enjoy all the uxuries of this life, their temptations were greater han the poor, and, conſequently, more difficult to ithſtand. But though the rich are more immedia- ely expoſed to the ſnares which Satan ſpreads for our ſouls in the pleaſures and luxuries of life, the nxiety about, and love of temporal things, is but oo common to every ſituation in life, and if, in his reſpect, the temptations of the poor are leſs, he greater will be their condemnation if they yield o them. 'Tis true the poor man has it not in his ower to taſte what are called the pleaſures of the orld, but his mind may nevertheleſs be equally, ay, more turned towards them than the rich. He ay look with an eye of envy and diſſatisfaction pon the poſſeſſions of his rich neighbour, luſt after he power of pleaſures he enjoys, and murmur gainſt his merciful Creator for removing him at a iſtance from what he falſely terms ſo much happi- neſs; alas! he conſiders not the temptations annex- d to a ſtate of affluence, how many duties and cares t neceſſarily brings to the poſſeſſor, even if his ind is turned to employ it according to the word of his Lord, in feeding the hungry and cloathing he naked, and if, on the contrary he conſumes that which was given him for the good of his fellow- reatures in vain pleaſures and vile exceſſes, what

an additional weight of ſin will it not lay on his ſoul. Theſe conſiderations ought to make a ſtate of poverty; or, at leaſt of mediocrity, ſo far from inſpiring diſcontent, appear to be the greateſt bleſſing. "Give me neither poverty nor riches," ſays the holy Pſalmiſt, "but food convenient for me!

A man who is ſelfiſh may, when aſked to give a mite out of his pittance to help his poor neighbour, excuſe himſelf by ſaying, I am poor and cannot afford to give any thing; were I as rich as ſuch one, I would freely give to thoſe who wanted. It is preſumptuous to ſay what we would do in another ſtation, and it may be held as a certain rule, that he who is backward to aſſiſt his poor neighbour with the few things that Providence has committed to his charge, would be equally ſo were his riches ever ſo great; a truly compaſſionate and charitable heart will, though placed in ever ſo humble a ſtation, find means of exerciſing acts of charity and love, and we read, that a cup of cold water given in the name of Jeſus will be accepted by our merciful Saviour as well as the richeſt gifts. The great thing in our pilgrimage through life, is in all our concerns, to take care that the deſire of our heart be turned conſtantly toward God and our Redeemer; this alone will prevent the cares and pleaſures of the world from choaking the good ſeed that is ſown in our hearts.

A poor man, who has a numerous family, for the ſupport of which he is obliged to work early and late, will perhaps be apt to exclaim, Alas! how is it poſſible, ſurrounded as I am with cares and perplexities, that my heart can be conſtantly turned towards God? My attention muſt be fixed on temporal things or my family muſt ſtarve. This is however, nothing but the ſuggeſtion of the evil

Spirit, who, as I have before ſaid, is ready to ſeize any opportunity to turn us from the right way; we are not required wholly to lay aſide our domeſtic concerns, on the contrary, we are enjoined to be good fathers, good huſbands, and good maſters, or if our ſituation be more humble, good ſervants, which we cannot be if we wholly neglect temporal things. God will, moreover, give a bleſſing to the honeſt and induſtrious, but he requires us not to be too anxious, nor too ſtrongly attached to the things of this world; we may purſue the labours neceſſary to the gaining of an honeſt livelihood, and yet keep our thoughts turned conſtantly towards God, we can accuſtom ourſelves to look up to him as the ſource of every bleſſing we enjoy, and to the Being who has created, and loaded us with innumerable bleſſings; we ſhould never forget that his eye is conſtantly upon us, that he has ordered all things for our good, that he has not withheld even his bleſſed Son to procure for us a bleſſed immortality; and do not ſuch mercies to poor ſinful creatures require the ſacrifice of our whole heart? ought any thing in this life to be ſet in competition with the love we owe for ſuch unſpeakable goodneſs? We turn with diſguſt from a man who, having received a benefit from his fellow repayeth it with ingratitude; and what are the higheſt benefits we can receive from men, compared with the malleſt we receive from our Maker? Is it poſſible that we can ever ariſe from a refreſhing ſleep, ſtrengthened and made us fit for the duties of the ſucceeding day, without feeling our hearts voluntarily raiſed toward God with gratitude and love, and will not this be encreaſed when we reflect that in a ſtate of inactivity, ſo nearly reſembling death, he

has been pleaſed to preſerve us, and permit us agai
to glorify his holy name? Is it poſſible when we ri
from a plentiful meal, without being ſenſible of th
ſame emotion? When we look round too and be
hold a ſmall family, healthful and good, who pro
miſe to be the ſupport of our declining years, is no
our hearts again elevated with gratitude to the grea
Giver of all good gifts? And if we receive good
from our bountiful Creator ſhall we not receive
evil, and bleſs him alſo for that? "Our circum-
ſtances," ſays a pious writer, "are never ſo low an
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Almighty wills the happineſs of all his creature
and that whenever he afflicts us it is for our good
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hearts turned to God, and ſhall learn to eſtimate
and uſe the things of this world as we ought, to be
grateful for the poſſeſſion of them, but to conſide
them as ſhadows that will quickly paſs away, an
unworthy to engroſs ſo large a portion of our heart
as to wean us from our more important concern
the welfare of our eternal ſouls; by theſe mean
"we ſhall lay up for orſelves treaſures in heaven
where neither moth nor ruſt can corrupt, nor thieve
break through and ſteal," for where our treaſure i
therh will be our heart.

The cares, the perplexities, the pleaſures of lif
will appear nothing to us, when compared with th
concerns of an eternal exiſtence. Thorns will no
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God will fill our hearts, and even in this life give u

ſhat peace which paſſeth all underſtanding, and which the world, with its moſt captivating pleaſures, cannot beſtow.

Laſtly, "He," ſays our Lord, "who received the ſeed into good ground, is he that heareth the word and underſtandeth it, which alſo beareth fruit, ſome an hundred fold, ſome ſixty, ſome thirty. He who underſtandeth the word, is he who hears or reads it with that faith, humility, and ardent deſire of edification, which God cannot fail to bleſs, by the enlightening of his underſtanding. This faith produced on his heart bears thoſe bleſſed fruits, truth, charity, patience, meekneſs, hope, reſignation, holy fear, brotherly love, humility, all thoſe heavenly tempers by which alone we can be aſſured that the ſeed has fallen into good ground. For our faith is nothing unleſs it produce ſuch fruits, we may profeſs ourſelves to be the diſciples of Chriſt, may call upon his holy name, ſay prayers, perform all the outward duties of religion and perſuade ourſelves that we are in a ſtate of regeneration, but in all this we do but deceive ourſelves, for our faith is not the true faith, unleſs it bring forth charity. I cannot conclude better than by giving the Apoſtle Paul's definition of this chriſtian virtue; "charity ſuffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itſelf, is not puffed up; doth not behave itſelf unſeemly, ſeeketh not her own, is not eaſily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in truth: beareth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

THE END.

A LIST of TRACTS.

HISTORIES.

Delays are Dangerous.
The Affectionate Orphans.
The Wreck.
The Wife Reformed.
Betty Gillis.

SUNDAY READINGS.

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The History of Samson.
The History of St. Peter the Apostle.
The Sower. A Parable.

POETRY.

Richard and Rebecca.
The Good Aunt.
The Wanderer.
The Fatal Choice.
Easter Monday.